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ABSTRACT

The National Association of Independent Schools defines high standards and ethical behavior for independent school operations. Professional admission procedures include maintaining confidentiality. Business officers' responsibilities can range from being accountable to the school head to participating in professional assistance associations. Fund raising should exemplify professional conduct; e.g., the school should refuse gifts that detract from the institution's integrity and should disclose the use of funds to constituents. Among other responsibilities, independent school heads should uphold the school mission and work with staff to examine student needs. School search committees and consultants must practice certain principles such as devising a search process that is both fair and cost effective. Guidelines for teachers and supervisors include using a variety of teaching techniques and establishing positive relationships with students. Ways for trustees to gain an understanding of the school encompass becoming informed about the school's goals and asking questions. Boards of trustees must make decisions that conform to school objectives by using practices such as preparing a statement of each school's philosophy and objectives. (EJS)

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PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR MEMBER SCHOOLS



National Association of Independent Schools



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Overview

The *NAIS Principles of Good Practice for Member Schools* define high standards and ethical behavior in key areas of independent school operations — admission, fund raising, financial and business management, instruction, governance, and headship.

The impetus for creating and publishing the principles can be found in the NAIS mission statement, which commits the association to articulating and promoting high standards of educational quality and ethical behavior for its membership. Each set of principles is drafted by an NAIS committee of practitioners in that professional area, submitted to the NAIS Board of Directors for approval, then distributed to every member school.

The collected *NAIS Principles of Good Practice for Member Schools* reflect the overall dedication to quality education that has always characterized independent schools





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Admission

The primary concern of independent schools must always be for the welfare of their students and their admission applicants. The following principles of good practice are intended to provide common ground for the interaction of students and schools, parents and schools, and schools with schools. Understanding and appreciation of the interests and obligations of each will help ensure orderly and professional admission procedures.

1. A school will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national or ethnic origin in the administration of its admission policies.
2. A school recognizes the right of its students or families to visit and consider other schools without notifying the present school. It also recognizes and respects the right of another school to hold preliminary discussions about the possibility of admission without notifying the present school.
3. Upon request and as promptly as possible, a school will send a transcript (or its equivalent) and other pertinent information to another school to which a student has applied.
4. A school will take all reasonable and lawful measures to maintain the confidentiality of reports and information exchanged among schools concerning students and parents.
5. A school will not offer a place to a student without first receiving an official transcript (or its equivalent) from the student's present school.
6. A school will allow each candidate reasonable time to accept the offer of a place.
7. A school will make clear all dates concerning the admission procedure and ensure adherence to those dates. The candidate and the parents will be informed of the complete costs of the forthcoming school year.
8. A school will require adequate documentation of family financial resources before awarding financial aid based on need. Such an award will not exceed the demonstrated need of the family.
9. The director of admission and, by extension, the head of each school bear the ultimate responsibility for communicating these principles of good practice to all those professional staff and volunteers (including parents, alumni/ae, coaches, and faculty members) who represent the institution in admission, promotion, and recruitment activities and for ensuring that these principles are upheld.
10. School representatives should speak accurately and comprehensively about the strengths of their own institution and not allege weaknesses in other schools.

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Business Managers

Although responsibilities of business officers are as varied as the institutions they serve, the following principles provide a common standard of good practice for individuals vested with the responsibility for the school's financial and physical resources.

1. The business officer, accountable to the school head and working with appropriate trustee committees, manages the school's resources in a prudent and careful manner consistent with the mission and goals of the school.
2. The business officer understands and supports the mission, standards, and policies of the school, contributes to their formulation and evaluation, and is able to interpret them to others.
3. The business officer conducts himself/herself with honesty, integrity, and dignity in managing the resources of the school and expects and encourages integrity in colleagues, vendors, parents, and students.
4. The business officer generally attends all regular business meetings of the board of trustees in order to provide full, accurate, and complete management and financial information as necessary to assist the board in meeting its fiduciary responsibilities.
5. The business officer administers the school's benefit programs, payroll information, and personnel policies with sensitivity both to the confidential nature of this information and employees' right to privacy.
6. The business officer encourages clearly written and consistent personnel policies in accord with good practice and government regulation.
7. The business officer protects the school by implementing safety practices and procedures, maintaining adequate liability, professional, and casualty insurance; conserving financial and other resources of the school; and seeking legal and other counsel as necessary and appropriate.
8. The business officer manages efficiently the daily operation of the business office; maintains accurate records; assists in the preparation and monitoring of the annual budget in a way that best balances and serves the many needs of the school; causes the school's books to be externally audited; complies with local, state, and federal regulations and reporting requirements; responds promptly to parent inquiries about accounts; keeps the physical plant clean, trim, and in good and timely repair; and fosters good business practice throughout the school.
9. The business officer is aware of possible conflicts of interest that may arise in conducting the business of the school and refrains from accepting duties, incurring obligations, receiving gifts or favors of monetary value, or engaging in private business or professional activities where there is, or could appear to be, a conflict between the officer's private interests and the interests of the school.
10. The business officer fosters professional standards and development by participating in local and national associations that offer personal support and professional assistance.

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Fund Raising

The development program of the school should exemplify the best qualities of the institution and should reflect the highest standards of personal and professional conduct on the part of everyone concerned. The following principles of good practice are addressed to those involved in the school's development operation—trustees, school head, chief financial officer, development director and staff, volunteers, and consultants.

1. The school should refuse gifts that in any way detract from the purpose, character, integrity, freedom, or independence of the institution.
2. The school should use gifts for the particular purpose designated by the donor or as set forth in the solicitation material, unless received for general purposes.
3. The school should safeguard a donor's privacy and other confidential information.
4. The school should leave the donor the responsibility for assigning a value to tangible property for income tax purposes.
5. The school should encourage donors who are considering planned or deferred gifts to consult with their attorneys and/or financial advisers.
6. The school should accept gifts only as voluntary contributions and not in lieu of tuition or other charges.
7. The school should disclose publicly to its constituencies the use of all funds received through philanthropy.
8. The school should hire development staff members and consultants at a set salary or fee, not on a commission basis.
9. The school should in no way disparage other educational institutions in promoting its own merits.
10. The school should follow the letter and spirit of all laws and regulations affecting or relating to institutional development activities.

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Heads

The head of an independent school as educational and moral leader is responsible for enabling the school community to achieve the school's mission. Although NAIS acknowledges differences in styles of leadership and school operation, it nevertheless offers the following principles of good practice to provide a common perspective on this responsibility.

1. The head, with the board of trustees, shapes and upholds the school's mission, goals, and standards and articulates them to the school's constituencies and to the wider community.
2. The head is responsible for attracting well-qualified faculty and staff members and for retaining them through equitable compensation plans, sound staff development and evaluation programs, and concern for their status within the school and in the larger community.
3. The head works with the staff to examine the needs of students and to put in place programs and policies to meet those needs.
4. The head, ultimately responsible for all administrative decisions and actions, regularly involves members of the administration and faculty in decision making and evaluation.
5. The head is accessible, within reason, and responsive to all constituencies—faculty, parents, students, and graduates—and in particular ensures that parents are kept informed about the school's policies, programs, and the progress of their children.
6. The head identifies ways to serve graduates and to retain their loyalty as advocates of the school and as contributors to its financial strength and well-being.
7. The head oversees the well-being of the entire school, rather than of any individual constituency, and works to help all constituencies to see the school as part of a network of local, state, regional, and national organizations concerned with educational issues and excellence.
8. The head, as steward of the school's resources, is responsible for prudent budgeting and financial management, maintenance of the physical plant, review and long-range planning, and fund raising.
9. The head is alert to changing patterns in the local community, especially those that may affect enrollment or diversity within the school, and ensures that admission and hiring policies adhere to the school's written policies on nondiscrimination and due process.
10. The head asks the trustees for an annual evaluation. As part of board development, the head ensures that trustees evaluate the school periodically on its operation in relation to stated goals and mission and that they review their own functioning as a board.

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11. The head finds ways to become part of a network of peers who can provide personal support and professional assistance.

12. The head cooperates with heads of other independent schools to ensure that good relations among schools are protected, especially in the four sensitive areas of admission, marketing, faculty recruitment, and fund raising.

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School Search Committees and Search Consultants

The following principles of good practice are designed to help search committees as they embark upon the task of selecting a school head. Each school must decide for itself whether it will retain a consultant to help with the search. If the school does decide to engage professional counsel, the same principles should be observed.

Search Committee

1. The board and search committee should devise a search process that is viewed as fair, orderly, and cost-effective by all parts of the school community.
2. The search committee should actively solicit the names of the best available candidates drawn from a broad candidate group without regard to age, race, religion, gender, or national origin unless the school has a religious mission that requires the head to have a particular religious affiliation.
3. The search committee should see pertinent materials related to any and all candidates, including applications that come from outside the consultant's regular network.
4. The search committee should recognize the sensitivity of visits by trustees to a candidate's present school. The consultant should work with the search committee and candidate to see that such visits are complete and thorough yet at no time jeopardize the relation of the candidate to his or her present school. School visits should be made only when the candidate and search committee are at a mutually serious stage.
5. The search committee should exercise the greatest sensitivity with candidates who are not selected, recognizing their investment of time and emotional energy and respecting their professional reputation and relationships.

Search Consultants

1. The prospective consultant should provide the search committee with a complete list of schools recently served (including the names and telephone numbers of references).
2. In outlining procedures to the search committee, the consultant should provide a full written description of services offered, including expenses and fees. In the case of a consulting firm, the search committee should be told which person in the firm will do the search and should interview that person prior to any contracting for services.
3. The consultant should make known the names of other schools for which he or she is actively performing a search for persons to fill a similar position.
4. The consultant should limit searches during any given period to a number that will assure service of high quality to each client school.

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5. The search consultant should make a reasonable effort to understand the school, its mission, its culture, and the nature of the position to be filled.
6. The school, not the individual candidate, should always be the client.
7. Both consultant and search committee should check candidates' references with great care. The consultant is responsible for presenting a candidate for consideration by the search committee and for emphasizing the committee's responsibility after that time.
8. The consultant should respect the confidentiality of each candidacy and impress upon both search committee and candidates the importance of discretion. Any candidate now a head who is seriously exploring other school headships should so inform his or her current board chair in confidence.
9. The consultant should keep the search committee fully informed about the progress of the assignment throughout the search and ensure that each candidate is informed fully and promptly about the status of his or her candidacy.
10. The consultant should refrain from inviting the head of a school placed in that position by the consultant's firm within the past five years to become a candidate for the client school.
11. No consultant or any member of the consultant's firm should be a candidate for a position in which the consultant is conducting a search.

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Teachers and Supervisors of Teachers

Entrusted with the education of children, the independent school teacher promotes the best interests of the child within the context of the school's philosophy. Those who supervise teachers are responsible for the quality of teaching and for promoting growth in those who teach. The following principles of good practice provide guidelines for teachers and for supervisors of teachers in their joint efforts to educate children.

Teachers

1. The teacher has a thorough knowledge appropriate for his teaching assignment and stays abreast of recent developments in the field.
2. The teacher uses a variety of teaching techniques suitable to the age and needs of the students and the subject matter being taught.
3. The teacher establishes positive relationships with students, which, while recognizing the differing roles of adult and child, are characterized by mutual respect and good will.
4. The teacher collaborates with colleagues and the school's leadership in the design and implementation of curriculum within the context of the school's overall program and mission.
5. The teacher initiates growth and change in her own intellectual and professional development, seeking out conferences, courses, and other opportunities to learn.
6. The teacher is self-aware and self-monitoring in identifying and solving student, curricular, and school problems. At the same time, the teacher knows the mission and policies of the school and, when questions or concerns arise, raises them with appropriate colleagues and supervisors.
7. The teacher serves his school outside the classroom in a manner established by the individual school and consistent with the responsibilities of a professional educator. For example, teachers often serve as advisers, coaches, or activity sponsors.
8. The teacher participates in the establishment and maintenance of an atmosphere of collegial support and adherence to professional standards.
9. The teacher welcomes supervision in the context of clearly defined and well-communicated criteria of evaluation.
10. The teacher models integrity, curiosity, responsibility, creativity, and respect for all persons as well as an appreciation for racial, cultural, and gender diversity.

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Supervisors of Teachers

1. The supervisor has thorough knowledge appropriate to her supervisory assignment and stays abreast of recent developments in the field. The supervisor also exemplifies in her own work with faculty members the qualities that she hopes to develop in the faculty.
2. The supervisor develops and administers a comprehensive system of hiring, consistent with the policies of the school, which results in the appointment of the best-qualified candidate and a well-informed match between school and teacher. Throughout the hiring and supervisory processes, the supervisor values racial, cultural, and gender diversity.
3. The supervisor ensures that faculty members new to the school receive orientation and support sufficient for them to work effectively and with confidence that they are carrying out the educational mission, policies, and procedures of the school.
4. The supervisor ensures that teachers are informed of both praise and criticism of their work and that useful support and assistance are available to each teacher to improve the quality of teaching.
5. The supervisor makes available to all faculty members on an equitable basis whatever resources the school can provide for professional growth and development, both inside and outside the school.
6. The supervisor encourages and challenges teachers to initiate curricular improvement by providing the necessary time and resources and by creating structures to foster faculty collaboration on curriculum development.
7. The supervisor leads faculty members in upholding high standards of professional behavior and responds immediately when behavior occurs that is harmful to children or harmful to the school community.
8. The supervisor evaluates and works to improve teaching through classroom visits, discussions with teachers, and other methods that are fair and consistent with the practices of the individual school. Evaluation is based on clearly articulated criteria that teachers have helped define and occurs in a context of respect for the teacher's professional knowledge and decision-making capability. The supervisor also monitors his own work by inviting suggestions and critiques from teachers.
9. When a faculty member's future in the school is in question, the supervisor devotes sufficient attention and resources to ensure that the situation is resolved or that the faculty member's departure from the school is handled with attention to due process and to the dignity of the individual.
10. The supervisor ensures that all personnel policies are clearly articulated to faculty members and makes every effort to promote the establishment of salaries and benefits commensurate with the professional responsibilities of teaching.

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Independent School Trustees

The responsibility of a trustee of an independent school is to gain a basic understanding of all aspects of the school's operation and then to initiate, or support, board actions that will advance the standards and goals set for in the school's statement of philosophy. The following principles of good practice are offered to encourage participation of every trustee in the important work of the board.

1. A trustee's first obligation is to become informed about the school's history, goals, and current operations and concerns.
2. A trustee should come to meetings prepared, having read the minutes of previous meetings and other pertinent materials, and should participate in the consideration of all matters before the board. Only through the sharing of diverse opinions can constructive decisions be reached.
3. A trustee should not hesitate to ask questions. A full understanding of the issues is prerequisite to casting an informed vote.
4. The board of trustees, as a whole, sets policy. An individual trustee should never seek to impose a personal agenda on the head of the school or become involved in specific management or curricular issues.
5. A trustee must always respect the confidentiality of board discussions. The credibility of the board goes hand in hand with confidentiality.
6. Trustees should seek out and volunteer for assignments, particularly those that may lessen the special burdens carried by the head, such as serving as the school's representative at conferences and meetings.
7. A trustee must guard against any conflict of interest, whether business-related or personal. Trustees who are parents must take particular care to separate the interests of the school from those of a child.
8. A trustee has a responsibility to support the school head actively and to demonstrate that support within the school community.
9. The trustee who learns of a problem should bring that problem to the attention of the school head or board president. A trustee should not attempt to deal with such a situation on an individual basis.
10. Every trustee has a responsibility to contribute to the advancement program of the school. This should include, but not be limited to, financial support or other active involvement in annual giving and capital campaigns as an integral part of trusteeship.
11. Each trustee, not just the treasurer or finance committee, has a fiduciary responsibility for the funds entrusted to the school and for sound budgetary management.

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Boards of Trustees

In an independent school, the responsibility of the board of trustees is to be aware, to the fullest extent possible, of all matters that pertain to the philosophy and goals of the school and to assure that decisions of the board conform to these stated objectives. The following principles of good practice are set forth to provide a common perspective on the board's responsibilities for individual trustees, board presidents, and school heads.

1. The board is responsible for preparing a clear statement of the school's philosophy and objectives. This philosophy should be reviewed on a regular basis and taken into consideration whenever possible changes of policy are under discussion.
2. The board has complete and final responsibility in all fiscal affairs of the school, including assets represented by buildings and grounds.
3. The board is responsible for selecting a new head of the school, when needed. Care should be exercised to guard against delegating too great a responsibility in this most critical matter to nonboard persons or consultants.
4. The board is responsible for establishing the policies under which the head will administer the school. Every school should include in its catalogue a policy statement regarding nondiscrimination and reflect this policy in its faculty, staff, and student mix.
5. The board must ensure that the school has sufficient public relations capacity, under competent leadership, to convey the school's message to the public and to the school's various constituencies.
6. The board should establish working committees (see the *NAIS Trustee Handbook*) and be sure that all members are actively involved in appropriate committee assignments.
7. The board is responsible for a periodic evaluation of the school, taking into consideration the school's stated philosophy and goals. Board members should be given copies of any periodic evaluations conducted by outside accrediting organizations.
8. The board, or a committee of the board, should conduct a written annual evaluation of the performance of the head and establish goals for the following year. Because this review should not relate to compensation, it should be undertaken only after the matter of compensation has been settled.
9. The board should conduct a written annual self-evaluation, including consideration of whether the board and its committees are independently knowledgeable concerning school matters or are relying too heavily upon the head and other staff for guidance. The head of the school should also evaluate the board's performance.
10. The board is responsible for keeping full and accurate minutes of its meetings and those of its committees.

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11. The board should maintain a policy book so that governing decisions made over a period of years may be readily available to subsequent leadership and administrators.

12. A rotation system for board membership should be established to assure regular infusion of new thinking while maintaining continuity of volunteer leadership to work with the board of the school. The composition of the board should reflect whatever diversity exists within the school's constituencies. It may be necessary for the board actively to recruit members from other groups to achieve this diversity.

13. The board should establish a policy of sharing statistical information about the school with local and national professional organizations.

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